

# The Man Who Was Dead

By Thomas H. Knight

It was a wicked night, the night I met the man who had died. A bitter, heart-numbing night of weird, shrieking wind and flying snow. A few black hours I will never forget.

"Well, Jerry, lad!" my mother said to me as I pushed back from the table and started for my sheepskin coat and the lantern in the corner of the room. "Surely you're not going out a night like this? Goodness gracious, Jerry, it's not fit!"

"Can't help it, Mother," I replied. "Got to go. You've never seen me miss a Saturday night yet, have you now?"

"No. But then I've never seen a night like this for years either. Jerry, I'm really afraid. You may freeze before you even get as far as—"

"Ah, come now, Mother," I argued. "They'd guy me to

death if I didn't sit in with the gang to-night. They'd chaff me because it was too cold for me to get out. But I'm no pampered sissy, you know, and I want to see—"

"Yes," she retorted bitingly, "I know. You want to go and bask in that elegant company. Our stove's just as good as the one down at that dirty old store," continued my persistent and anxious parent, "and it's certainly not very flattering to think that you leave us on a night like this to—Who'll be there, anyway?"

"Oh, the usual five or six I suppose," I answered as I adjusted the wick of my lantern, hearing as I did the snarl and cut of the wind through the evergreens in the yard.

"That black-whiskered sphinx, Hammersly, will he be there?"

"Yes, he'll be there, I'm pretty sure."

"Hm-m!" she exclaimed, her expression now carrying all the contempt for my judgment and taste she

intended it should. "Button your coat up good around your neck, then, if you must go to see your precious Hammersly and the rest of them. Have you ever heard that man say anything yet? Does he speak at all, Jerry?" Then her gentle mind, not at all accustomed to hard thoughts or contemptuous remarks, quickly changed. "Funny thing about that fellow," she mused. "He's got something on his mind. Don't you think so, Jerry?"

"Y-es, yes I do. And I've often wondered what it could be. He certainly's a queer stick. Got to admit that. Always brooding. Good fellow all right, and, for a 'sphinx' as you call him, likable. But I wonder what is eating him?"

"What do you suppose it could be, Jerry boy?" questioned Mother following me to the door, the woman of her now completely forgetting her recent criticisms and, perhaps, the rough night her son was about to step into. "Do you suppose the poor chap has a—a—broken heart, or something like that? A girl somewhere who jilted him? Or maybe he loves someone he has no right to!" she finished excitedly,

the plates in her hand rattling.

"Maybe it's worse than that," I ventured. "P'r'aps—I've no right to say it—but p'r'aps, and I've often thought it, there's a killing he wants to forget, and can't!"

I heard my mother's sharp little "Oh!" as I shut the door behind me and the warmth and comfort of the room away. Outside it was worse than the whistle of the wind through the trees had led me to expect. Black as pitch it was, and as cold as blazes. For the first moment or two, though, I liked the feel of the challenge of the night and the racing elements, was even a little glad I had added to the dare of the blackness the thought of Hammersly and his "killing." But I had not gone far before I was wishing I did not have to save my face by putting in an appearance at the store that night.

Every Saturday night, with the cows comfortable in their warm barn, and my own supper over, I was in the habit of taking my place on the keg or box behind the red-hot stove in Pruett's store. To-night all the

snow was being hurled clear of the fields to block the roads full between the old, zigzag fences. The wind met me in great pushing gusts, and while it flung itself at me I would hang against it, snow to my knees, until the blow had gone along, when I could plunge forward again. I was glad when I saw the lights of the store, glad when I was inside.

They met me with mock applause for my pluck in facing the night, but for all their sham flattery I was pleased I had come, proud, I must admit, that I had been able to plough my heavy way through the drifts to reach them. I saw at a glance that my friends were all there, and I saw too that there was a strange man present.

A very tall man he was, gaunt and awkward as he leaned into the angle of the two counters, his back to a dusty show-case. He attracted my attention at once. Not merely because he appeared so long and pointed and skinny, but because, of all ridiculous things in that frozen country, he wore a hard derby hat! If he had not been such a queer character it would have been laughable, but as it was it was—creepy. For the

man beneath that hard hat was about as queer a looking character as I have ever seen. I supposed he was a visitor at the store, or a friend of one of my friends, and that in a little while I would be introduced. But I was not.

I took my place in behind the stove, feeling at once, though I am far from being unsociable usually, that the man was an intruder and would spoil the evening. But despite his cold, dampening presence we were soon at it, hammer and tongs, discussing the things that are discussed behind hospitable stoves in country stores on bad nights. But I could never lose sight of the fact that the stranger standing there, silent as the grave, was, to say the least, a queer one. Before long I was sure he was no friend or guest of anyone there, and that he not only cast a pall over me but over all of us. I did not like it, nor did I like him. Perhaps it would have been just as well after all, I thought, had I heeded my mother and stayed home.

Jed Counsell was the one who, innocently enough, started the thing that changed the evening, that had begun so badly, into a nightmare.

"Jerry," he said, leaning across to me, "thinkin' of you s'afternoon. Readin' an article about reincarnation. Remember we were arguin' it last week? Well, this guy, whoever he was I've forgot, believes in it. Says it's so. That people *do* come back." With this opening shot Jed sat back to await my answer. I liked these arguments and I liked to bear my share in them, but now, instead of immediately answering the challenge, I looked around to see if any other of our circle were going to answer Jed. Then, deciding it was up to me, I shrugged off the strange feeling the man in the corner had cast over me, and prepared to view my opinions.

"That's just that fellow's belief, Jed," I said. "And just as he's got his so have I mine. And on this subject at least I claim my opinion is as good as anybody's." I was just getting nicely started, and a little forgetting my distaste for the man in the corner, when the fellow himself interrupted. He left his leaning place, and came creaking across the floor to our circle around the store. I say he came "creaking" for as he came he did creak. "Shoes," I naturally, almost unconsciously

decided, though the crazy notion was in my mind that the cracking I heard did sound like bones and joints and sinews badly in need of oil. The stranger sat his groaning self down among us, on a board lying across a nail keg and an old chair. Only from the corner of my eye did I see his movement, being friendly enough, despite my dislike, not to allow too marked notice of his attempt to be sociable seem inhospitable on my part. I was about to start again with my argument when Seth Spears, sitting closest to the newcomer, deliberately got up from the bench and went to the counter, telling Pruett as he went that he had to have some sugar. It was all a farce, a pretext, I knew. I've known Seth for years and had never known him before to take upon himself the buying for his wife's kitchen. Seth simply would not sit beside the man.

At that I could keep my eyes from the stranger no longer, and the next moment I felt my heart turn over within me, then lie still. I have seen "walking skeletons" in circuses, but never such a man as the one who was then sitting at my right hand. Those



side-show men were just lean in comparison to the fellow who had invaded our Saturday night club. His thighs and his legs and his knees, sticking sharply into his trousers, looked like pieces of inch board. His shoulders and his chest seemed as flat and as sharp as his legs. The sight of the man shocked me. I sprang to my feet thoroughly frightened. I could not see much of his face, sitting there in the dark as he was with his back to the yellow light, but I could make out enough of it to know that it was in keeping with the rest of him.

In a moment or two, realizing my childishness, I had fought down my fear and, pretending that a scorching of my leg had caused my hurried movement, I sat down again. None of the others said a word, each waiting for me to continue and to break the embarrassing silence. Hammersly, black-whiskered, the "sphinx" as my mother had called him, watched me closely. Hating myself not a little bit for actually being the sissy I had boasted I was not, I spoke hurriedly, loudly, to cover my confusion.

"No sir, Jed!" I said, taking up my argument. "When a

man's dead, he's dead! There's no bringing him back like that highbrow claimed. The old heart may be only hitting about once in every hundred times, and if they catch it right at the last stroke they may bring it back then, but once she's stopped, Jed, she's stopped for good. Once the pulse has gone, and life has flickered out, it's out. And it doesn't come back in any form at all, not in this world!"

I was glad when I had said it, thereby asserting myself and downing my foolish fear of the man whose eyes I felt burning into me. I did not turn to look at him but all the while I felt his gimlety eyes digging into my brain.

Then he spoke. And though he sat right next to me his voice sounded like a moan from afar off. It was the first time we had heard this thing that once may have been a voice and that now sounded like a groan from a closely nailed coffin. He reached a hand toward my knee to enforce his words, but I jerked away.

"So you don't believe a man can come back from the grave, eh?" he grated. "Believe that once a man's

heart is stilled it's stopped for good, eh? Well, you're all wrong, sonny. All wrong! You believe these things. I *know* them!"

His interference, his condescension, his whole hatefulness angered me. I could now no longer control my feeling. "Oh! You *know*, do you?" I sneered. "On such a subject as this you're entitled to *know*, are you? Don't make me laugh!" I finished insultingly. I was aroused. And I'm a big fellow, with no reason to fear ordinary men.

"Yes, I know!" came back his echoing, scratching voice.

"How do you know? Maybe you've been—?"

"Yes, I have!" he answered, his voice breaking to a squeak. "Take a good look at me, gentlemen. A good look." He knew now that he held the center of the stage, that the moment was his. Slowly he raised an arm to remove that ridiculous hat. Again I jumped to my feet. For as his coat sleeve slipped down his forearm I saw nothing but bone supporting his hand.

And the hand that then bared his head was a skeleton hand! Slowly the hat was lifted, but as quickly as light six able-bodied men were on their feet and half way to the door before we realized the cowardliness of it. We forced ourselves back inside the store very slowly, all of us rather ashamed of our ridiculous and childlike fear.

But it was all enough to make the blood curdle, with that live, dead thing sitting there by our fire. His face and skull were nothing but bone, the eyes deeply sunk into their sockets, the dull-brown skin like parchment in its tautness, drawn and shriveled down onto the nose and jaw. There were no cheeks. Just hollows. The mouth was a sharp slit beneath the flat nose. He was hideous.

"Come back and I'll tell you my yarn," he mocked, the slit that was his mouth opening a little to show us the empty, blackened gums. "I've been dead once," he went on, getting a lot of satisfaction from the weirdness of the lie and from our fear, "and *I* came back. Come and sit down and I'll explain why I'm this living skeleton."

We came back slowly, and as I did I slipped my hand into my outside pocket where I had a revolver. I put my finger in on the trigger and got ready to use the vicious little thing. I was on edge and torn to pieces completely by the sight of the man, and I doubt not that had he made a move towards me my frayed nerves would have plugged him full of lead. I eyed my friends. They were in no better way than was I. Fright and horror stood on each face. Hammersly was worst. His hands were twitching, his eyes were like bright glass, his face bleached and drawn.

"I've quite a yarn to tell," went on the skeleton in his awful voice. "I've had quite a life. A full life. I've taken my fun and my pleasure wherever I could. Maybe you'll call me selfish and greedy, but I always used to believe that a man only passed this way once. Just like you believe," he nodded to me, his neck muscles and jaws creaking. "Six years ago I came up into this country and got a job on a farm," he went on, settling into his story. "Just an ordinary job. But I liked it because the farmer had a pretty little daughter of about sixteen or seventeen and as easy as could be.

You may not believe it, but you can still find dames green enough to fall for the right story.

"This one did. I told her I was only out there for a time for my health. That I was rich back in the city, with a fine home and everything. She believed me. Little fool!" He chuckled as he said it, and my anger, mounting with his every devilish word, made the finger on the trigger in my pocket take a tighter crook to itself. "I asked her to skip with me," the droning went on, "made her a lot of great promises, and she fell for it." His dry jaw bones clanked and chattered as if he enjoyed the beastly recital of his achievement, while we sat gaping at him, believing either that the man must be mad, or that we were the mad ones, or dreaming.

"We slipped away one night," continued the beast. "Went to the city. To a punk hotel. For three weeks we stayed there. Then one morning I told her I was going out for a shave. I was. I got the shave. But I hadn't thought it worth while to tell her I wouldn't be back. Well, she got back to the farm some way, though I don't know—"

"What!" I shouted, springing before him. "What! You mean you left her there! After you'd taken her, you left her! And here you sit crowing over it! Gloating! Boasting! Why you—!" I lived in a rough country. Associated with rough men, heard their vicious language, but seldom used a strong word myself. But as I stood over that monster, utterly hating the beastly thing, all the vile oaths and prickly language of the countryside, no doubt buried in some unused cell in my brain, spilled from my tongue upon him. When I had lashed him as fiercely as I was able I cried: "Why don't you come at me? Didn't you hear what I called you? You beast! I'd like to riddle you!" I shouted, drawing my gun.

"Aw, sit down!" he jeered, waving his rattling hand at me. "You ain't heard a thing yet. Let me finish. Well, she got back to the farm some way or another, and something over a year later I wandered into this country again too. I never could explain just why I came back. It was not altogether to see the girl. Her father was a little bit of a man and I began to remember what a meek and weak sheep he was. I got

it into my head that it'd be fun to go back to his farm and rub it in. So I came.

"Her father was trying out a new corn planter right at the back door when I rounded the house and walked towards him. Then I saw, at once, that I had made a mistake. When he put his eyes on me his face went white and hard. He came down from the seat of that machine like a flash, and took hurried steps in the direction of a doublebarrelled gun leaning against the woodshed. They always were troubled with hawks and kept a gun handy. But there was an ax nearer to me than the gun was to him. I had to work fast but I made it all right. I grabbed that ax, jumped at him as he reached for the gun, and swung—once. His wife, and the girl too, saw it. Then I turned and ran."

The gaunt brute before us slowly crossed one groaning knee above the other. We were all sitting again now. The perspiration rolled down my face. I held my gun trained upon him, and, though I now believed he was totally mad, because of a certain ring of truth in that empty voice, I sat fascinated. I looked at Seth. His jaw was hanging loose, his eyes bulging.



Hammersly's mouth was set in a tight clenched line, his eyes like fire in his blue, drawn face. I could not see the others.

"The telephone caught me," continued our ghastly story-teller, "and in no time at all I was convicted and the date set for the hanging. When my time was pretty close a doctor or scientist fellow came to see me who said, 'Blaggett, you're slated to die. How much will you sell me your body for?' If he didn't say it that way he meant just that. And I said, 'Nothing. I've no one to leave money to. What do you want with my body?' And he told me, 'I believe I can bring you back to life and health, provided they don't snap your neck when they drop you.' 'Oh, you're one of *those* guys, are you?' I said then. 'All right, hop to it. If you can do it I'll be much obliged. Then I can go back on that farm and do a little more ax swinging!'" Again came his horrible chuckle, again I mopped my brow.

"So we made our plans," he went on, pleased with our discomfiture and our despising of him. "Next day some chap came to see me, pretending he was my brother. And I carried out my part of it by cursing him

at first and then begging him to give me decent burial. So he went away, and, I suppose, received permission to get me right after I was cut down.

"There was a fence built around the scaffold they had ready for me and the party I was about to fling, and they had some militia there, too. The crowd seemed quiet enough till they led me out. Then their buzzing sounded like a hive of bees getting all stirred up. Then a few loud voices, then shouts. Some rocks came flying at me after that, and it looked to me as though the hanging would not be so gentle a party after all. I tell you I was afraid. I wished it was over.

"The mob pushed against the fence and flattened it out, coming over it like waves over a beach. The soldiers fired into the air, but still they came, and I, I ran—up, onto the scaffold. It was safer!" As he said this he chuckled loudly. "I'll bet," he laughed, "that's the first time a guy ever ran into the noose for the safety of it! The mob came only to the foot of the scaffold though, from where they seemed satisfied to see the law take its course. The sheriff was nervous. So cut up that he only made a fling at tying my

ankles, just dropped a rope around my wrists. He was like me, he wanted to get it over, and the crowd on its way. Then he put the rope around my neck, stepped back and shot the trap. Zamm! No time for a prayer—or for me to laugh at the offer!—or a last word or anything.

"I felt the floor give, felt myself shoot through. Smack! My weight on the end of the rope hit me behind the ears like a mallet. Everything went black. Of course it would have been just my luck to get a broken neck out of it and give the scientist no chance to revive me. But after a second or two, or a minute, or it could have been an hour, the blackness went away enough to allow me to know I was hanging on the end of the rope, kicking, fighting, choking to death. My tongue swelled, my face and head and heart and body seemed ready to burst. Slowly I went into a deep mist that I knew then was *the* mist, then—then—I was off floating in the air over the heads of the crowd, watching my own hanging!

"I saw them give that slowly swinging carcass on the end of its rope time enough to thoroughly die, then,

from my aerial, unseen watching place, I saw them cut it—me—down. They tried the pulse of the body that had been mine, they examined my staring eyes. Then I heard them pronounce me dead. The fools! I had known I was dead for a minute or two by that time, else how could my spirit have been gone from the shell and be out floating around over their heads?"

He paused here as he asked his question, his head turning on its dry and creaking neck to include us all in his query. But none of us spoke. We were dreaming it all, of course, or were mad, we thought.

"In just a short while," went on the skeleton, "my 'brother' came driving slowly in for my body. With no special hurry he loaded me onto his little truck and drove easily away. But once clear of the crowd he pushed his foot down on the gas and in five more minutes—with me hovering all the while alongside of him, mind you—floating along as though I had been a bird all my life—we turned into the driveway of a summer home. The scientific guy met him. They carried me into the house, into a fine-fitted laboratory.

My dead body was placed on a table, a huge knife ripped my clothes from me.

"Quickly the loads from ten or a dozen hypodermic syringes were shot into different parts of my naked body. Then it was carried across the room to what looked like a large glass bottle, or vase, with an opening in the top. Through this door I was lowered, my body being held upright by straps in there for that purpose. The door to the opening was then placed in position, and by means of an acetylene torch and some easily melting glass, the door was sealed tight.



[Image description start: A black and white illustration showing a dead man, clothed only with a small loincloth, suspended in the air by a harness inside a large glass container shaped like a lightbulb, while two scientists wearing lab coats and safety goggles look on. Image description end.]

"So there stood my poor old body. Ready for the experiment to bring it back to life. And as my new self floated around above the scientist and his helper I smiled to myself, for I was sure the experiment would prove a failure, even though I now knew that the sheriff's haste had kept him from placing the rope right at my throat and had saved me a broken neck. I was dead. All that was left of me now was my spirit, or soul. And that was swimming and floating about above their heads with not an inclination in the world to have a thing to do with the husk of the man I could clearly see through the glass of the bell.

"They turned on a huge battery of ultra-violet rays then," continued the hollow droning of the man who had been hanged, "which, as the scientist had explained to me while in prison, acting upon the contents of the syringes, by that time scattered through my whole body, was to renew the spark of life within the dead thing hanging there. Through a tube, and by means of a valve entering the glass vase in the top, the scientist then admitted a dense white gas. So thick was it that in a moment or two my body's

transparent coffin appeared to be full of a liquid as white as milk. Electricity then revolved my cage around so that my body was insured a complete and even exposure to the rays of the green and violet lamps. And while all this silly stuff was going on, around and around the laboratory I floated, confident of the complete failure of the whole thing, yet determined to see it through if for no other reason than to see the discomfiture and disappointment that this mere man was bound to experience. You see, I was already looking back upon earthly mortals as being inferior, and now as I waited for this proof I was all the while fighting off a new urge to be going elsewhere. Something was calling me, beckoning me to be coming into the full spirit world. But I wanted to see this wise earth guy fail.

"For a little while conditions stayed the same within that glass. So thick was the liquid gas in there at first that I could see nothing. Then it began to clear, and I saw to my surprise that the milky gas was disappearing because it was being forced in by the rays from the lights in through the pores into the



body itself. As though my form was sucking it in like a sponge. The scientist and his helper were tense and taut with excitement. And suddenly my comfortable feeling left me. Until then it had seemed so smooth and velvety and peaceful drifting around over their heads, as though lying on a soft, fleecy cloud. But now I felt a sudden squeezing of my spirit body. Then I was in an agony. Before I knew what I was doing my spirit was clinging to the outside of that twisting glass bell, clawing to get into the body that was coming back to life! The glass now was perfectly clear of the gas, though as yet there was no sign of life in the body inside to hint to the scientist that he was to be successful. But I knew it. For I fought desperately to break in through the glass to get back into my discarded shell of a body again, knowing I must get in or die a worse death than I had before.

"Then my sharper eyes noted a slight shiver passing over the white thing before me, and the scientist must have seen it in the next second, for he sprang forward with a choking cry of delight. Then the lolling head inside lifted a bit. I—still desperately clinging with my

spirit hands to the outside, and all the time growing weaker and weaker—I saw the breast of my body rise and fall. The assistant picked up a heavy steel hammer and stood ready to crash open the glass at the right moment. Then my once dead eyes opened in there to look around, while I, clinging and gasping outside, just as I had on the scaffold, went into a deeper, darker blackness than ever. Just before my spirit life died utterly I saw the eyes of my body realize completely what was going on, then—from the inside now—I saw the scientist give the signal that caused the assistant to crash away the glass shell with one blow of his hammer.

"They reached in for me then, and I fainted. When I came back to consciousness I was being carefully, slowly revived, and nursed back to life by oxygen and a pulmotor."

The terrible creature telling us this tale paused again to look around. My knees were weak, my clothes wet with sweat.

"Is that all?" I asked in a piping, strange voice, half

sarcastic, half unbelieving, and wholly spellbound.

"Just about," he answered. "But what do you expect? I left my friend the scientist at once, even though he did hate to see me go. It had been all right while he was so keen on the experiment himself and while he only half believed his ability to bring me back. But now that he'd done it, it kinda worried him to think what sort of a man he was turning loose of the world again. I could see how he was figuring, and because I had no idea of letting him try another experiment on me, p'r'aps of putting me away again, I beat it in a hurry.

"That was five years ago. For five years I've lived with only just part of me here. Whatever it was trying to get back into that glass just before my body came to life—my spirit, I've been calling it—I've been without. It never did get back. You see, the scientist brought me back inside a shell that kept my spirit out. That's why I'm the skeleton you see I am. Something vital is missing."

He stood up cracking and creaking before us,

buttoning his loose coat about his angular body. "Well, boys," he asked lightly, "what do you think of that?"

"I think you're a liar! A damn liar!" I cried. "And now, if you don't want me to fill you full of lead, get out of here and get out now! If I have to do it to you, there's no scientist this time to bring you back. When you go out you'll stay out!"

"Don't worry," he grimaced back to me, waving a mass of bones that should have been a hand contemptuously at me, "I'm going. I'm headed for Shelton." He stalked the length of the floor and shut the door behind him. The beast had gone.

"The dirty liar!" I cried. "I wish—yes—I wish I had an excuse to kill him. Just think of that being loose, will you? A brute who would think up such a yarn! Of course it's all absurd. All crazy. All a lie."

"No. It's not a lie."

I turned to see who had spoken. Hammersly's voice was so unfamiliar and now so torn in addition that I

could not have thought he had spoken, had he not been looking right at me, his glittering eyes challenging my assertion. Would wonders never cease? I asked myself. First this outrageous yarn, now Hammersly, the "sphinx," expressing an opinion, looking for an argument! Of course it must be that his susceptible and brooding brain had been turned a bit by the evening we had just experienced.

"Why Hammersly! You don't believe it?" I asked.

"I not only believe it, Jerry, but now it's my turn to say, as he did, I *know* it! Jerry, old friend," he went on, "that devil told the truth. He was hanged. He was brought back to life; and Jerry—I was that scientist!"

Whew! I fell back to a box again. My knees seemed to forsake me. Then I heard Hammersly talking to himself.

"Five years it's been," he muttered. "Five years since I turned him loose again. Five years of agony for me, wondering what new devilish crimes he was perpetrating, wondering when he would return to

that little farm to swing his ax again. Five years—five years."

He came over to me, and without a word of explanation or to ask my permission he reached his hand into my pocket and drew out my revolver, and I did not protest.

"He said he was headed for Shelton," went on Hammersly's spoken thoughts. "If I slip across the ice I can intercept him at Black's woods." Buttoning his coat closely, he followed the stranger out into the night.

I was glad the moon had come up for my walk home, glad too when I had the door locked and propped with a chair behind me. I undressed in the dark, not wanting any grisly, sunken-eyed monster to be looking in through the window at me. For maybe, so I thought, maybe he was after all not headed for Shelton, but perhaps planning on another of his ghastly tricks.

But in the morning we knew he had been going

toward Shelton. Scientists, doctors, and learned men of all descriptions came out to our village to see the thing the papers said Si Waters had stumbled upon when on his way to the creamery that next morning.

It was a skeleton, they said, only that it had a dry skin all over it. A mummy. Could not have been considered capable of containing life only that the snow around it was lightly blotched with a pale smear that proved to be blood, that had oozed out from the six bullet holes in the horrid chest. They never did solve it.

There were five of us in the store that night. Five of us who know. Hammersly did what we all wanted to do. Of course his name is not really Hammersly, but it has done here as well as another. He is black-whiskered though, and he is still very much of a sphinx, but he'll never have to answer for having killed the man he once brought back to life.

Hammersly's secret will go into five other graves besides his own.